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ABSTRACT

The needs assessment model developed in the Lansing School District has the advantages of encouraging decentralized educational decision-making at the building level including program budgeting and personnel assignments, of providing a system for community input, and of providing a commonality of student goals and objectives between all buildings. Development of the model involved teachers, parents, and students from two elementary schools and one secondary school. Goal prioritization, needs prioritization, and a system for addressing identified needs during a school year by building and by classroom are a part of this model. (Author)

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Needs Assessment Model Building In An Urban, Decentralized School System

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This paper describes the process used in developing a needs assessment model in the Lansing School District. This paper does not set forth an experimental study; nor does it purport to be last word in needs assessment. Rather, it describes the development of a process used to promote an awareness of the importance of systematic needs assessment at the local school building level. It describes the method used to train teachers, principals, parents and students in conducting needs assessment at the local school building level. As the model described here becomes more refined and more widely utilized, a vigorous validation procedure will be appropriate.

To put the information in perspective, a demographic description of the school district seems appropriate. Lansing is the capitol city of Michigan, located near the center of the lower peninsula, with employment divided among government, industry and education. The Lansing School District serves over 30,000 K-12 students who have varied ethnic backgrounds. At the elementary level, of 16,997 students, 71% are designated Caucasian, 18% as Negro, 9% as Spanish Surnamed, 1% as American Indian and 1% as "other". At the secondary level, of 13, 412 students, 75% are designated as Caucasian, 17% as Negro, 7% Spanish Surnamed, 1% as American Indian and 1% as "other".

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Organized to address needs of students on an individualized basis with increasing community involvement at the building level, the school district provides a wide range of educational services. The individualized instructional program is augmented by categorical programs including the handicapped, vocational education, alternative education, expectant parents, numerous state and federal compensatory programs and adult and continuing education.

The school district is involved in a desegregation plan which became court-ordered in 1972. This plan involves two-way bussing for approximaterly 290 minority and 940 majority students, grades 3-6. Extension of this plan to more schools and more youngsters is, at the present time, in the courts.

Background and Perspectives

The study described in this paper was built upon the premise that needs assessment activities will be most meaningful when implemented at the school building level as well as the central level. For four years the Lansing School District has operated under a decentralized system termed "Responsible Autonomy". The philosophy behind this thrust is that many educational decisions should be made at the level closest to the client, i.e., the school level. An inherent part of this philosophy is that those decisions should involve, at the building level, several shareholders in the eductional process -- parents, teachers, principals, support staff, and at the secondary level, students. This involvement takes place through the Community Involvement Committee (CIC). A CIC exists at each of Lansing's fifty-six (56) elementary and secondary schools.

Responsible Autonomy does not take away the role of the central staff but re-defines it as one of supportive services to buildings as they develop and implement educational programs. Many traditional functions of central administration remain the same such as data processing services, accounting services, district-wide testing, lunch services, negotiations, continuing education, vocational education, etc.

At the same time that decentralization of decision-making has been encouraged, a comprehensive evaluation model has been instituted. The CIPP Model (Context, Input, Process, and Product) of Stufflebeam has been adopted by the district. This model was considered to fit well into decentralized decision-making need because it emphasizes program improvement and still provides a format to use information at other than the summative stage.

Schools traditionally have not been encouraged to systematically determine their educational needs, to plan strategies to meet those needs and to allocate budget expenditures based on those needs. It is not realistic to expect schools to accept these new responsibilities with immediate expertise. Systematic support of school administrators and school staff members has been and will continue to be needed as they change and add to their roles.

The Needs Assessment model described and the steps taken to arrive at such a model is one example of the re-focusing of decision-making that has taken place and continues to take place in the Lansing School District.

Objectives of the Model

To develop and implement a needs assessment model which satisfies the following criteria:

a. Encourages increased input from all client groups (parent input, student input, administrator input, teacher input).

b. Supports a decentralized approach to educational decision-making based on documented student needs, i.e., budget allocations, delivery systems, personnel placements.

c. Provides for a balance between local ownership and evaluation methodology. An important balance since local ownership promotes implementation and evaluation methodology assures a valid assessment of educational needs.

Pre-requisites to Model Development

To insure some commonality in terminology and procedures, the needs assessment process, grades K-12, followed the same format. This enabled parents who have children in various grades and buildings to understand and provide input through the CIC (Community Involvement Committee).

There are a number of prepared needs assessment packages currently on the market. However, these are built around a specific set of objectives. Although these packages may serve as a basis for a school needs assessment, additional work is needed to re-design or modify these packages to fit particular districts and specific buildings within a district. Rather than going through the process of restructuring a commercially prepared needs assessment program, the Lansing School District decided that, with the same amount of time and effort, a

needs assessment model could be designed and implemented by Lansing personnel. Thus, ownership could be instilled as a factor of the model.

When working with the teachers in Lansing, the issue of time was of great concern. The teachers were willing to be involved in a needs assessment and felt that it was an important ingredient to be included in their planning structure, however, their time was limited. This concern was deemed legitimate and therefore, the needs assessment procedure was designed to be performed in less than two hours.

Procedures in Model Development

To gain as much input from the schools as possible and thus encourage local ownership, a group of three schools was invited to participate in the development of the Lansing School District Needs Assessment; two elementary and one secondary. Within the schools, CIC sub-committees were developed to work on the project. These committees included teachers, administrators, students and parents.

The developmental consultant, acting in an advisory capacity, assisted the three schools in establishing the nine-step Lansing Needs Assessment Model presented below:

LANSING NEEDS ASSESSMENT MODEL

1. Develop needs assessment interest groups.

   a. Parents
   b. Teachers
   c. Administration
   d. Students

2. A presentation is made to the needs assessment group of all pertinent information regarding the status of the on-going school program.

3. Each group rank orders goals to determine priorities.

4. On a check list, needs assessment group members determine current status of the school program in relation to each of the competencies. This determines the school needs.

5. Teachers and administration then determine an educational action plan based on the formula stage 2 - stage 3.

6. Each building then develops school and classroom strategies to reduce above formula to zero.

7. Each teacher develops room plan for year -- to determine supplies, materials and resources necessary. These room plans should not be confused with lesson plans. Rather they should state briefly how the teacher anticipates handling the school needs within her classroom.

8. Presentation of all suggestions in steps 5 and 6 are submitted to the CIC for information.

9. Copies of school and classroom plans sent to Planning Department for approval.

During this phase of the project, the developmental consultant had three prime responsibilities: maintaining a high interest level by all client groups, insuring a final product that could be incorporated within the instruction and evaluation format (CIPP Model) utilized by the school district and the development of the instruments necessary to produce a needs assessment package that would practically serve all of the schools in the district.

The Lansing Model required the development of two instruments. The first instrument, referred to as Component A, provides an indication of the general goals that the client groups within a school deem as most important for inclusion in a school-wide instructional scheme. The second instrument, referred to as Component B, provides the school planning committee with the perceived status of the "target goals"

derived as a result of completion and analysis of Component A. At this stage, each goal is divided into several competency areas. For example, in Component A the goal might be the basic skill and function of mathematics. In Component B that goal would be divided into several competency statements such as: 1) develop number and symbol recognition, and 2) perform story or word problems. As a result of utilizing both of these instruments, the school planning committee is in a position to adequately determine the emphasis necessary to provide for the kinds of educational experiences desired by the various client groups represented within the school community.

Instrumentation Development

Component A required the development of a list of educational goals that would be general enough to be usable in any school building yet specific enough to have sufficient educational meaning to all the client groups. To develop the initial list of goals, the developmental consultant reviewed the existing list of Lansing School District goals to ascertain the areas of concentration considered important by the Board of Education. These are general goal statements that cover seven broad areas; instructional programs, cultural diversity, enrichment, social relationships, handicapped children, vocational and accountability. The developmental consultant then proceeded through a process of reviewing existing collection of educational goals (text books, research literature, commercially produced educational objectives and goals, other needs assessment packages and various educational sources) to provide a general pool of specific goals and competency statements that followed the more general Board of Education goals. This list was

initially generated by the developmental consultant rather than the client groups to insure that all system goals were adequately represented, and the language used was understandable to all the client groups. It was felt that if the goals were loaded with educational jargon, certain, if not all, of the client groups would become confused by the meaning of the goals. As increased participation was a primary criterion for this model, extreme concern was exercised to avoid ambiguity in terminology. Appendix A provides a sketch of Component A along with the directions for using this instrument.

Component B was developed using the Component A goals as a model. For each of the goals a statement of needs or competencies was generated by the developmental consultant to increase specificity. Therefore, the current status would be determined in terms of specific needs as a factor of the broader school goals. The committees reviewed lists of need competency areas and suggested changes in wording. Changes were made and a final list of need areas was sent to all schools in the project for approval. Appendix B provides a sketch and list of directions used with Component B.

With the completion of the instrument development phase, the three schools in the development group pilot tested the needs assessment materials to assist in determing: a) ease of administration, b) time necessary to administer, score and interpret the instruments, and c) clarity of terms to all interest groups within the school community. Based on the results of this pilot testing, the developmental consultant made necessary revisions and the final package was sent to the pilot schools for approval.

Role of the Developmental Consultant

The developmental consultant was the only outside source affiliated with the development and implementation of this needs assessment model. Being an outside source, the developmental consultant was able to be more objective in dealing with the concerns and interests of each of the client groups involved including the school system's central administrative offices. Thus each of the client groups became equal partners in the development of the needs assessment model, rather than as helpers in someone else's project. At the same time the developmental consultant was responsible for the inclusion of appropriate evaluation methodology to provide for a valid model of determining the educational needs of each school.

To provide for a needs assessment model that would satisfy the criteria previously stated, the developmental consultant performed the following services:

a. Conducted meetings with each of the client groups separately to define the purpose and values of developing and using a needs assessment; to delineate the role each client group would have in the development of a school system model, and to explain how the model could be utilized within their school.

b. Coordinated a series of workshops. All client groups were present to review a list of objectives and needs which would form the basis of the Lansing Needs Assessment Model.

c. Developed the procedure and devices necessary for

conducting the needs assessment (Components A and B). This facet was perhaps the single most important responsibility of the developmental consultant as it had to incorporate the following ingredients:

1. Directions and procedures that are clearly stated, easily understood and workable with a minimum of confusion by all the client groups, thus avoiding extensive training in conducting the needs assessment.
2. Procedures that are educationally valid, thus providing for the determination of the educational needs of the school.

d. Conducted a pilot needs assessment in three schools and revised model accordingly.

Educational Benefits

Upon completion of the pilot, the three schools provided oral feedback as to the merits of the model. It was agreed that this model did serve the following purposes: encouraged input from all segments of the school community, provided a more efficient basis for local school budget development, and proposed a common set of goals for all classrooms within the school.

Since the pilot phase of this program, other school buildings have been encouraged to adopt or adapt the model. Here, what is important is not

so much one model over another, but the process that a given building uses with its community to determine and prioritize goals and objectives.

The model has been packaged and has been presented to all principals. Further, central staff members have demonstrated the model to other audiences such as citizen advisory groups, teacher advisory groups, faculty groups, and of course, the original audience for which the project was intended, Community Involvement Committees.

The claim that this model is usable, practical and durable has been reenforced since its recent piloting. During the school year 1975-1976, two schools requested additional assistance. One elementary school requested and obtained the services of the developmental consultant to assist in the modification of the model to fit the exact specifications of the client groups within that particular school. Thus, local ownership could be carried one step further. One junior high is now in the process of developing a student profile analysis which will serve as a data base for increased efforts in planning curriculum based on student need. These two developments indicate a concern and willingness on the part of the schools to develop and augment their educational programs such that they reflect the interests of the community serviced by the schools.

Summary - Lansing's Needs Assessment

This model is one step in providing training and support to educational decision-makers based on actual student need. Its strengths lie in its support of a decentralized decision-making process and its transferability to several client groups -- teachers, administrators, parents

and students. As local building staff become comfortable with this model and its ramifications, they will utilize more systematic evaluation and planning strategies.

APPENDIX A

Component A

		Primary Choices (Red)	Secondary Choices (Blue)
Goal 1	Learn the Basis Skills and Functions of Mathematics		
Goal 2			
"			
"			
"			
Goal 17			

Directions:

1. Each member of the needs assessment group is given three red markers and two blue markers.
2. Each individual places one red marker on each of the three competencies that he feels are most important.
3. Each individual places one blue marker on the two competencies he feels are next in importance..
4. One person (the scorer) then counts up the number of red and blue markers assigned to each competency. Each red marker counts two points and each blue marker counts one point. The competencies with the highest scores become the target competencies for the school. The number of competencies to be included in the target list will be left to the discretion of the school group, with three being the suggested number of competencies to be included.

APPENDIX B

Component B

DIRECTIONS FOR COMPLETING COMPONENT B: Please use the following score key. Be sure to rate all needs listed.

- Place a zero (0) on the blank if you feel you can not rate this need.
- Place a one (1) on the blank if you feel the need is adequately handled by the current school program.
- Place a two (2) if you feel the current program needs a slight amount of additional emphasis in dealing with this need.
- Place a three (3) if you feel the current program could use a considerable amount of additional emphasis or stress on the need.
- Place a four (4) if you feel this area has been neglected and a great amount of concern should be placed on reducing this need.

GOAL 1: "Learn the Basic Skills and Functions of Mathematics."

Possible needs for this competency:	RATING
a. Develop number and symbol recognition	____
b. Perform numerical problems.	____
c. Perform story or word problems.	____

DIRECTIONS FOR SCORING COMPONENT B:

1. Each individual fills out one sheet for each of the target competencies.
2. The scorer tabulates each need separately across all respondents (remember this means scoring each need, not each person). The following procedure should be implemented for scoring:
   a. Collect all sheets (develop intellectual curiosity and eagerness for life-long learning).
   b. Add up everyone's score on need.
   c. Repeat this process for needs "b" and "c".
   d. The need with the highest score becomes a school-wide need. This will provide for one school need to correspond with each competency chosen through use of Component A.

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